

Mon, February 21, 2011 1:16:27 PM  
Re: copy of the bill

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Kent Morrison

From: <kentmorrison1@yahoo.com>

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[View Contact](#)

To: pat wagman <patwagman@yahoo.com>

Dear House Chairman and Committee,

I am writing as a proponent for HB 591. As a parent of a cognitively delayed child I have had both positive and negative experiences with the quality, training and ability of public school teachers to manage and help my son. In many cases the choice for assistance for my son has been through the public school system and the wonderful personnel we have found there. However, there have been years where we have chosen to home school our son due to the lack of appropriate personal and/or environment to service our son's unique needs. The passage of HB 591 would guarantee the ability of a parent to find the most beneficial school environment for their special needs child to grow and thrive. Please support this bill.

Sincerely,

Kent Morrison

RE: HB0591.01

This bill would allow parents the freedom to choose where to educate their special needs students, and provide an alternative to the local school. As a private practice speech-language pathologist specializing in augmentative communication, I work with children with severe disabilities who cannot speak. Many of these children have parents who are frustrated with the services they receive from their local school district, yet because of the rural nature of our state, they have very few choices re: the educational programs they can enroll their children in. Often there is only one school available. This scholarship program would allow them to send the child to another school, or to seek private services when needed. Implementation of this bill would improve school services, simply because districts that fail to meet parent expectations will risk losing the student. It is well established that competition improves services. When parents have the option of removing their student and enrolling them elsewhere, the local school has a higher incentive to provide better services. At the same time, student outcomes are improved by allowing parents the freedom to get the student into a program that will meet their needs. In this way, it is a win win situation. Furthermore, it allows taxpayers to have a greater ability to direct where their tax dollars are going. As a parent, it is very difficult to know you are paying taxes to support the local school which is failing to meet the needs of your child. For those who are able to pay for these services privately, it is like having to pay for the service twice.

In addition to being a professional serving children with special needs, I also have a child with a special need.

Tanya Curtis

Sheridan, MT

## Testimony from Jaime Root, Kalispell, MT

My name is Jaime Root, and I am a parent of two special needs children in Kalispell, MT. My story begins with my son Austin. Austin showed signs that learning would be difficult starting in preschool. I held him out of kindergarten for one year and had him repeat pre-school. He did not make the progress learning letters, sounds or writing that a kindergartner or a first grader should make. His public school wanted to retain him after first grade, but that would put him two years behind his current class. I also suspected that he might have dyslexia, in which case, I had learned that retaining students like this never helps, they need special training, not just remediation.

I spoke with a reading tutor who had worked with Austin in the summer time, and she had recommended that I consider sending him to Stillwater Christian School. Austin's tutor recommended Stillwater because they had just begun a program that targeted students with dyslexia called NILD, National Institute for Learning Development. The school and the program would cost our immediate family and extended family thousands of dollars each year, but we were willing to try what we thought our child needed. Our children are our greatest investment.

We enrolled Austin at Stillwater Christian School in the 2nd grade and he began one-on-one learning therapy with the NILD educational therapist. The NILD program began giving Austin the specific building blocks that he needed to begin to learn to read, write, and process information while working to accommodate his daily school work in the classroom. Austin made great progress in this environment. In second grade, he could not read or write but by the end of 4th grade he was doing most work on par with the rest of the class.

By 6th grade, Austin had to leave Stillwater for the public school. The economy had turned in the valley, and it was very difficult to maintain the financial commitment to send Austin to a private school. I also wanted him to have the opportunity to play football, a sport not offered at Stillwater. We moved Austin, and our daughter Ireland, who had just completed kindergarten, back to the public school.

Austin continues to excel in both athletics, and school. He is in his sophomore year in high school and completing all course work without accommodation. He is even passing honors biology. He is a true success story of a determined student who received the right education and training at a time when he needed it most.

Ireland, our daughter, however continues to struggle with the same difficulties that Austin had. After moving her back to the local public school, she started in the special education program there. She did not make good progress, and I grew very frustrated that she was not receiving the training that she would benefit from. I have tried to work with the school to give them resources similar to those that Stillwater used with Austin, but the school struggles with staffing, time, and money

to even look at the resources suggested.

Stillwater or private schooling is not an option right now with our family as our livelihood is tied to the construction industry. It is such a hardship to realize that Ireland will not have the same educational opportunities that Austin did. It is a tragedy to watch our children not have the opportunity in the public school classroom to receive the education they should and are entitled to with federal and state dollars. The number of families who struggle with the same issue I have of not having the right service for their own children is overwhelming. Children like mine would benefit greatly by having the choice to truly have an "individualized education plan" and receive the education they need with the funding already provided. They would have the choice to meet their special education needs as stated in their IEP in the best way possible. As a parent of a special needs children, I am urging you to support this bill that will allow our children access to programs that they will truly benefit from.

These kids deserve a chance at a great education. We should have the opportunity to choose the best possible education for our children. Please support this bill.